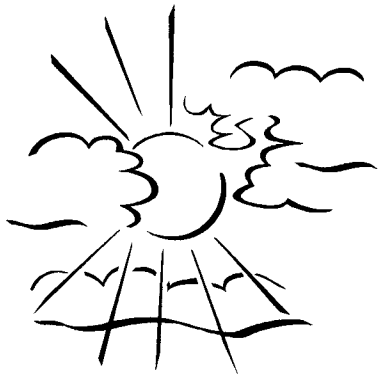


***Department
of
Human
Services***

Prepared by the
DHS Office of
Communications
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*Important story at this spot

Articles in Today's Clips
Thursday, Sept. 22, 2005

(Be sure to maximize your screen to read your clips)

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September 21, 2005

SENATE GRUMBLES, PASSES HOUSE OMNIBUS BUDGET

Nearly 40 percent of the state's 2005-06 budget is headed for Governor Jennifer Granholm's desk. The Senate grumbled about so much of the state's budget contained in one bill, HB 4831, but approved it on a 27-11 vote.

In passing the bill, Senate Republicans also issued a plea to Ms. Granholm to not veto funding for the Michigan Youth Correctional Facility in Baldwin, saying they had found funding that she could veto instead.

But a Democrat said the excess funding the Republicans had found in the Department of Corrections budget wasn't really excess because it was largely part of negotiated agreements.

Sen. Nancy Cassis (R-Novi) and Sen. Bruce Patterson (R-Canton) joined nine Democrats in opposing the bill. Ms. Cassis said her opposition was largely based on the omnibus nature of the budget.

"Each budget should stand on its own merit," she said. To combine them into one, "dilutes and diminishes" the Senate's role to serve its constituents, Ms. Cassis said. Plus, increases in some spending items could have been trimmed to allow for tax cuts, she said.

Sen. Deborah Cherry (D-Burton) said while there were many good things in the budget, there were areas she opposed. In particular, she opposed the allocation of funds in the higher education portion of the budget which she said favored some schools who have gotten bigger increases in recent years and not had to struggle as much as other universities.

But Sen. Mike Prusi (D-Ishpeming) said he would support the budget, though he hoped that with the 2006-07 fiscal year the Legislature returned to enacting separate budgets.

Details of the budget are in Tuesday's report (See Gongwer Michigan Report, September 20, 2005).

What drew the most intensity, however, was a call from Republicans to Ms. Granholm to veto \$17 million in a separate line item rather than the funding for the contract for the so-called punk prison in Baldwin. The Legislature has created a line Ms. Granholm can veto and administration officials have indicated that the governor will likely use that option.

Sen. Alan Cropsey (R-DeWitt) said it makes no sense eliminating prisons when the Department of Corrections is anticipating it will need more prison beds in the next several years.

He also said the state could cut \$3.5 million in a dry cleaning contract for prison guard uniforms, another \$3.5 million in a program to expand county jails (which he called defunct because the Legislature would not enact the sentencing guideline changes Ms. Granholm called for that would have diverted some defendants from state prison to local jails) and \$10.8 million in other savings.

"You can keep the jobs in Baldwin, keep the jobs in Newberry (the prison Republicans proposed closing instead of the MYCF) or you can veto Baldwin and keep the fat," Mr. Cropsey said. "Keep public safety number one in the state."

And Sen. Michelle McManus (R-Lake Leelanau), who represents the area, said the prison is of critical importance to the economy of Lake County, one of the poorest in the state. "If you are serious about jobs, I hope you choose the hardworking people of Lake County," she said.

But Sen. Michael Switalski (D-Roseville) said the savings identified by the Republicans were not real, because county jails will be forced to spend more due to overcrowding and because the other items were negotiated expenditures that the state will have to make whether or not the line item exists.

D.L.E.G. The Senate approved the conference report for the Department of Labor and Economic Growth (SB 276) on a 37-0 vote.

Michigan Report

September 21, 2005

M.D.O.T. BUDGET DRAWS FIRE AS HOUSE OKS BUDGET BILLS

Democratic opposition to a possible cut to Amtrak and aid for Upper Peninsula transit triggered a rare party-line vote on a budget as the 2005-06 spending plan for the Department of Transportation passed the House with the minimum number of votes for passage.

Legislators voiced upset at tying a \$1 million of a currently \$7.1 million subsidy for Amtrak to Amtrak's building a new maintenance facility in Battle Creek. There also was opposition sounded about reductions to UPTRAN, a public transit entity in the Upper Peninsula.

The budget passed 56-52 as Rep. Tom Casperson (R-Escanaba) joined all Democrats in opposition.

One of the highlights in the batch of budget bills passed by the House is the closure of several armories in the Department of Military and Veterans Affairs, a move the Granholm administration has said would save \$300,000. Slated to close are armories in Charlotte, Manistique, Menomonee, Saginaw and Three Rivers as well as the Lansing Maintenance Facility.

The other bill generating any notable opposition was for general government (SB 272), which still easily passed on a 94-12 vote.

Budgets unanimously passing the House with no debate were judiciary (SB 275) and Department of Military and Veterans Affairs (SB 277)

The budgets for the departments of Agriculture and **Human Services** (SB 264 and SB 271) passed on 105-1 votes.

Medicaid -- Cuts could have been worse

Thursday, September 22, 2005

By Sharon Emery
Lansing Bureau

LANSING -- About 600,000 low-income and disabled adults on Medicaid will once again be able to see a dentist for nonemergency care, two years after lawmakers cut the health benefit to save money.

The move is part of the state's 2006 fiscal year budget, which starts Oct. 1.

Supporters of restoring the benefit argued that poor dental health could lead to other, more expensive health problems and hinder recipients' ability to find work.

"It just makes so much sense in terms of saving money overall in the Medicaid program," said Jackie Doig, a staff attorney with the Center for Civil Justice, which advocates for low-income people. "It helps give people the most opportunity to be productive citizens."

Routine dental services for adult Medicaid recipients were cut Oct. 1, 2003, in an effort to save about \$10 million. Emergency dental treatment for those in severe pain with swelling and infection was maintained.

While the burgeoning taxpayer-funded health program -- now teetering at some \$7.1 billion annually and covering one of every seven Michigan residents -- was initially threatened with major cuts, lawmakers and Gov. Jennifer Granholm ultimately agreed on lesser measures. In the end, cuts to Medicaid totaled \$211.5 million, according to the Senate Fiscal Agency.

Among the most contentious issues was a proposal to have recipients sign personal responsibility agreements outlining health-enhancing actions they would take in exchange for reduced copays. Critics of copays said they'd prevent people from seeing doctors, and opponents of the agreements questioned their effectiveness.

"You'd basically be denying people health care for not being healthy," Doig said.

Personal responsibility agreements are optional in the new budget and not tied to copays.

Recipients who are not pregnant, disabled or under age 18 will be charged a \$2 copay to see a doctor, \$1 for outpatient hospital visits, \$3 for emergency room visits and \$50 for the first day of hospital stays. Current copays cover prescription drugs and specialty services, such as hearing and vision care.

"I believe (copays) will make people think twice about going to the doctor or the hospital," said Sen. Tom George, R-Kalamazoo, who wanted to tie copays to responsibility agreements. "... most working people have them, so it's hard to say Medicaid recipients shouldn't."

But making Medicaid patients fork over copays has doctor and hospital groups shaking their heads.

"That's a dollars-chasing-cents proposal," said Sherry Mirasola, a spokeswoman for the Michigan Health & Hospital Association. "It takes overhead and staff resources to collect it, and let's face it, a lot of people are not in a position to pay that."

The governor's plan to encourage more physicians to take Medicaid patients by paying them more, with the proceeds of a 4 percent "provider tax," was rejected. Low reimbursement rates mean Medicaid has trouble attracting doctors of all kinds, as well as dentists.

Instead, a proposed 4-percent cut in reimbursement rates for doctors and hospitals that treat Medicaid patients was ratcheted down to 3 percent. In addition, the reimbursement rate for obstetricians was upped 20 percent, in an effort to encourage more specialists to participate in Medicaid.

"We are really worried about access to prenatal care," said Ann Marston, president and CEO of the Michigan League for Human Services, a research and advocacy group. "Fewer and fewer people are willing to do the obstetrics, so this will help in preserving access."

The state is freezing Medicaid enrollment for 19- and 20-year-olds, and coverage will be eliminated for 18- to 21-year-olds who have a parent or guardian with access to dependent health insurance.

Nineteen- and 20-year-olds, as well as so-called caretaker relatives, such as grandparents who care for children served by Medicaid, will see benefits reduced if the state gets a waiver from federal Medicaid rules.

About \$48.7 million was allocated for increased Medicaid caseloads, but some question whether it will be enough.

Enrollment growth "doesn't seem to be slowing, and we don't see a major change coming," Marston said.

That will mean more lean budgets absent a sharp turnaround in the state's economy, said Tom Clay, a budget analyst with the Citizens Research Council of Michigan.

Spending growth in Medicaid and the Michigan Department of Corrections continues to crowd out other spending priorities. Municipal revenue sharing and state aid to most universities are essentially flat for fiscal 2006.

Republicans refused to consider the governor's call to increase revenue by closing \$112 million in tax breaks. Instead, the budget again relies on one-time revenues from budget shifting and increased tax collection enforcement.

While K-12 schools will receive \$175 per pupil more in state aid, education officials say rising health costs for teachers and retirees will offset the increase.

"Health care and corrections spending will continue to grow much faster than tax revenues, so we'll continue to have this ongoing (budget) crowding and squeezing," Clay said.

Reporter Peter Luke contributed to this report.

Medicaid restores dental care

Thursday, September 22, 2005

By Sharon Emery
Grand Rapids Press

LANSING -- About 600,000 low-income and disabled adults on Medicaid once again will be able to see a dentist for nonemergency care, two years after lawmakers cut the health benefit to save money.

The move is part of the state's 2006 fiscal-year budget, which starts Oct. 1.

Supporters of restoring the benefit argued poor dental health could lead to other, more-expensive health problems and hinder recipients' ability to find work.

"It just makes so much sense in terms of saving money overall in the Medicaid program," said Jackie Doig, a staff attorney with the Center for Civil Justice, which advocates for low-income people. "It helps give people the most opportunity to be productive citizens."

Routine dental services for adult Medicaid recipients were cut Oct. 1, 2003, in an effort to save about \$10 million. Emergency dental treatment for those in severe pain with swelling and infection was maintained.

While the burgeoning taxpayer-funded health program -- now teetering at some \$7.1 billion annually and covering one of every seven Michigan residents -- initially was threatened with major cuts, lawmakers and Gov. Jennifer Granholm ultimately agreed on lesser measures. In the end, cuts to Medicaid totaled \$211.5 million, according to the Senate Fiscal Agency.

Some local health advocates were stunned to hear dental benefits were being restored.

"Normally when there's a cut, it doesn't come back," said Kathy Sather, operations director for Cherry Street Health Services. "Frankly, we are very surprised."

Sather's organization's dental clinics provide about 80 percent of the Medicaid dental services in Grand Rapids, seeing up to 14,000 low-income patients each year who don't have dental insurance. So the loss of non-emergency dental care immediately was evident by the long lines of adults waiting for emergency service each morning, she said.

"When you can't afford dental care, what happens is you wait until you have a problem and you get your tooth pulled," Sather said. She added the dental benefit is desperately needed for poor mothers in Kent County, especially because of the area's high infant mortality rate.

"There's a direct link with having babies that are born too early due to poor dental care," she said. Among the most contentious issues facing lawmakers and Granholm in this Medicaid debate was a proposal to have recipients sign personal responsibility agreements outlining health-enhancing actions they would take in exchange for reduced copays. Critics of copays said they would prevent people from seeing doctors, and opponents of the agreements questioned their effectiveness.

"You'd basically be denying people health care for not being healthy," Doig said.

Press writer Kyla King contributed to this story.

Dental care restored

Thursday, September 22, 2005

By Brad Flory

bflory@citpat.com -- 768-4925

Low-income and disabled adults in Jackson County will again have Medicaid coverage for preventative dental care under the state's 2006 budget.

Lawmakers restored nonemergency dental care for adults two years after the benefit was cut to save money.

Dr. Jane Grover, director of the Center for Family Health Dental Clinic in Jackson, said the reversal shows lawmakers have come to see the importance of dental care to overall health.

"It (the cut) has been devastating to adults who need oral health care," Grover said. "We are so excited here we are almost afraid to talk about it."

Benefits would be restored beginning Oct. 1, but the Center for Family Health needs more time to study how it can increase services.

"We're delighted funding has been restored, but we still have capacity issues," said Molly Kaser, director of the Center of Family Health.

The dental clinic at 817 W. High St. has nine chairs. The clinic also has three chairs at Northeast Elementary School for students there.

Routine dental services for adult Medicaid recipients were cut Oct. 1, 2003, to save about \$10 million. Care to children was maintained.

Emergency treatment for adults in severe pain with swelling and infection was also maintained. Usually that meant pulling a tooth, Grover said.

The Center for Family Health maintained nonemergency care without payment for needy or high-risk groups including diabetics, pregnant women and group-home residents.

One first impact of restored benefits will be to give the center reimbursement for that care.

"This has cost us about \$350,000 a year," said Kaser. "Heaven knows we can use that money."

Critics have long argued the cut was short-sighted because dental problems left to fester can cause more expensive medical emergencies.

Infected teeth, for example, can produce mysterious fevers that can take days of hospital care to diagnose and treat, Grover said.

State Rep. Leslie Mortimer, R-Horton, pushed for restoration of dental coverage in the Medicaid budget.

"I have wanted this back in there forever," Mortimer said. "Dental care is so important to overall body health."

"There are a number of legislators who believe, morally, the wrong course was chosen when this was cut," said Kaser.

Deal sought in care for disabled adults

Thursday, September 22, 2005

By Greg Chandler
MUSKEGON CHRONICLE NEWS SERVICE

Mental health officials in Ottawa County will sit down with representatives of a Jenison-based organization to determine whether some adult clients with severe physical and developmental disabilities can be placed in a recently completed residential facility.

Community Mental Health Board Chairman Fred Vander Laan asked Monday that CMH Executive Director Gerry Cyranowski meet with officials from Harbor House Ministries to explore possibilities for funding clients at a second 12-bed home in Jenison that was certified to open last month.

"It's an excellent facility," Vander Laan said. "I think they have resources we need and we can use."

CMH has received more than 30 requests from families of clients asking to have their adult children placed at Harbor House. To date, agency officials have held off on making any placements, saying they do not have the funds needed to pay for additional support.

However, Vander Laan is hopeful something can be worked out.

"We need to put this issue to rest," he said. "We need to move on."

Harbor House Executive Director Jean MacDonald praised Vander Laan for urging a meeting between the two sides. "I'm thrilled," she said.

CMH provides full Medicaid funding support for nine residents and partial support for a 10th at Harbor House's first group home at an annual cost of about \$750,000. While such funding cannot be used for room and board, it is used for covering the cost of personal care and community living support for residents, Cyranowski said.

Cyranowski said earlier he had warned Harbor House that CMH may not be able to provide future financial support when the organization proposed building two more 12-bed homes. He also voiced reservations about placing clients in larger facilities as opposed to smaller family-run group homes.

Several small group-home operators spoke out Monday, seeking what they term as more equitable funding for their homes.

Linda Portoluri, of Grand Haven, who cares for two people with multiple disabilities and a third with Down syndrome, said she receives less than half of the funding an organization such as Harbor House receives for care of patients.

"To me, when I make \$77 per day per client versus \$177, it's a big (difference)," Portoluri said.

However, CMH officials say decisions on funding levels usually are made based on an assessment of each client's needs.

At one point, CMH board member Harris Schipper, a former county commissioner, proposed the county pursue an August millage request for mental health services.

"If this passes, we will then have money ... for what we want to spend, how we want to spend it," Schipper said.

No timetable has been set for any meeting between CMH and Harbor House, but Vander Laan said he wants it to happen "as soon as possible."

Schools accept responsibility for students' safety on buses

Thursday, September 22, 2005

JOE SNAPPER
THE SAGINAW NEWS

Heeding a mother's complaints, Carrollton Public Schools leaders on Wednesday acknowledged responsibility for the safety of a 4-year-old who cut open his head during a school bus ride. But Superintendent Craig C. Douglas also said a bus driver was following procedure when, after learning Marlon Wilkins Jr. missed his stop, she asked another student to wake him and seat him up front.

The child, who missed his stop after his 10-year-old sister forgot he had started full days of kindergarten and did not know he was aboard, promptly fell asleep again, Community Education Coordinator Gina Wilson said.

The boy rolled off his seat when the bus braked, cutting his head, Wilson said.

When the child didn't come home Monday afternoon, his mother called school officials, who alerted the driver. The driver was not at fault because when the boy's sister exited, the driver twice called Marlon's name but got no response, Wilson said.

Maria Wilkins, 37, said Tuesday that she was furious after school officials told her it was not the driver's responsibility to ensure each child exits the bus at the correct stop.

While the school won't budge on a policy requiring a driver to check over the bus only at the day's end, Douglas acknowledged that the school generally is responsible for students' safety on buses.

"We accept responsibility for the kid's safety," Douglas said. "We are very sorry he got a cut on his head. We are glad it was not a serious cut."

The boy, who required brief medical attention Monday night, stayed home from school Tuesday but was back in class Wednesday, Douglas said.

Joe Snapper is a staff writer for The Saginaw News. You may reach him at 776-9715.

Seniors get help around the house

Wayne County will serve 1,200-1,500 residents through Chore Services during the next 15 months.

By Karen Bouffard / The Detroit News

September 22, 2005

LINCOLN PARK -- Eleanor Wiejacha, 74, is a stickler for a clean house. She vacuums, dusts and does her own laundry.

But some projects are just impossible because Wiejacha is blind. Wiejacha's Lincoln Park home recently got a good cleaning from a crew, paid for by Wayne County. Walls were scrubbed, carpets shampooed, windows washed.

She can't see the results. But just knowing her house is clean makes Wiejacha feel a whole lot better.

The Wayne County Commission has appropriated \$550,000 to pay for chore services for senior citizens during the next 15 months. Some of the money will be matched by state funds, for a total of about \$750,000.

Officials expect 1,200-1,500 seniors to benefit from the Chores Services program.

Chore Services will pay for yard work, house cleaning, snow shoveling and many other things many seniors can't do or afford to have done.

The program is under way, but will be officially launched on Oct. 22, which is "Make a Senior Smile Day." On that day, several hundred volunteers will blitz Wayne County neighborhoods in a whirlwind of lawn mowing, leaf raking and other tidying up.

"The housecleaning did me a world of good," Wiejacha said. Bill Campbell, resource development manager for the Senior Alliance, said the program will boost self-esteem for seniors -- and could even save lives.

"That generation has a lot of pride in how their home looks," Campbell said. "If there are weeds growing in the cracks of their sidewalks, it hurts them.

"If somebody is too weak to drive to the store, they shouldn't be out raking their leaves or shoveling their snow," Campbell added.

According to Campbell, the services will be provided on a sliding scale, so people will pay only what they can afford. Wiejacha had her walls, windows and carpets washed for free, and paid \$25 to have her couch and chair shampooed.

Kevin Kelley, director of senior citizens services for Wayne County, said the program will be evaluated after 15 months. The county hopes to recruit corporate sponsors, such as Home Depot, to contribute.

"Over the next 15 months, we're going to make it a viable program, and it's something we hope will be able to continue," Kelley said.

Services for seniors

- The Wayne County Chore Services program will provide free or low-cost yard work, snow removal, house cleaning and other services for senior citizens.

- Residents who live in Detroit, Hamtramck, Highland Park, Harper Woods and the Grosse Pointes should call the Detroit Area Agency on Aging, at (313) 446-4444; seniors who live in Downriver communities or western Wayne County can call The Senior Alliance, at (734) 722-2830.

What's next

- The Chore Services program will host "Make a Senior Smile Day" Oct. 22. Hundreds of volunteers will mow lawns, rake leaves and tidy yards for seniors across the county.

- To volunteer, call your Wayne County commissioner, or visit the commission's Web site at waynecounty.com.

"This is a great thing because a lot of people want to stay in their homes but they just need some assistance," Kelley added. Karen Gross, 63, said workers have been out to her Taylor home twice already.

"They cleaned up my backyard, there was a lot of debris behind the garage," Gross said. "They cut the lawn, trimmed bushes and edged the lawn.

"It's a lot to think about and wonder how it's going to get done."

You can reach Karen Bouffard at (734) 462-2206 or kbouffard@detnews.com.

Woman, 83, dies after assault

Thursday, September 22, 2005

rhall@kalamazoogazette.com 388-7784

An 83-year-old Kalamazoo Township woman assaulted last week by two men who broke into her residence has died, police said.

Terissa Wood died at home on Saturday, five days after township officers responded to a report of a robbery at her and her husband's house in the 700 block of Avondale Drive.

Her husband of 62 years, Richard Wood, also 83, was to bury her this morning.

Investigators are awaiting the results of a final autopsy to determine whether the woman died from natural causes or from injuries suffered in the assault, according to Kalamazoo Township police.

Detective Sgt. Paul Erlandson said results of a preliminary autopsy were inconclusive in determining a cause of death.

Police have said two Kalamazoo men knocked on the door of the Wood residence about 7:40 p.m. Sept. 12, asked to use the phone, got inside and assaulted the couple.

Casey James Scofield-Christman, 23, and Charles Stephen Ryder, 40, are being held in the Kalamazoo County Jail, each on charges of first-degree home invasion, two counts of assault with intent to rob while unarmed and one count of conspiracy to commit unarmed robbery.

Police have said Scofield-Christman and Ryder were not armed during the robbery. Police said the two fled the home with several items. Wood and her husband were later treated at Borgess Medical Center for injuries that included a dislocated jaw, cuts and bruises.

In addition to her husband, Wood is survived by four children, two granddaughters, two brothers, a sister, two sisters-in-law, and several nieces and nephews, according to Parchment-Redmond Funeral Home.

Shine the light of understanding on child sexual abuse

Bay City Times

Thursday, September 22, 2005

The Nathan Weidner Children's Advocacy Center wants everyone in Bay County to know "7 Steps to Protecting Our Children."

The 14-page booklet, purchased with a Bay Area Community Foundation grant, is a no-nonsense guide that the center is distributing to get the word out about child sexual abuse. It's needed.

The shocking facts make that crystal clear.

One in three girls and one in four boys is sexually abused at some time during childhood, according to the U.S. Department of Justice.

What's more, about 93 percent of the victims across the nation know their abuser. Locally, experts guess that percentage is higher - 97 percent.

Yes, there are monsters out there.

They are people we know.

This booklet can help everybody see that.

- Our View is the editorial opinion of The Bay City Times, as determined by the newspaper's editorial board, which includes the editorial page editor, the editor and the publisher.

Pregnant teen to stand trial in stabbing death of girl, 14

FLINT

THE FLINT JOURNAL FIRST EDITION

Thursday, September 22, 2005

By Ken Palmer kpalmers@flintjournal.com • 810.766.6313

A pregnant teenager will stand trial in the stabbing death of a 14-year-old girl during a Sept. 4 brawl on Welch Boulevard.

Cachet Dent, 17, told police she stabbed Dequandra Holden in self-defense while Holden and another girl were punching and kicking her as she lay on the ground.

But another witness testified that Dent broke away from the younger girl before picking up a knife from the ground and coming at Dequandra from behind.

Flint District Judge Michael D. McAra said he could not conclude the stabbing was self-defense and ordered Dent to stand trial on a second-degree murder charge.

Holden, who was stabbed several times in the upper body with a kitchen knife, was among four people slain during a violent Labor Day weekend in the city.

About eight females were involved in the 10 p.m. altercation at 1609 Welch, witnesses said.

Matthew Mims, a friend of Holden's who watched the incident from the house next door, testified the brawl began when Dent began yelling at Holden, challenging her to fight.

At some point, Dent ended up on the ground and other people joined the fight, Mims said. But Dent got up, picked up a knife and came up behind Holden, reaching over her shoulder, he said.

But Mims, who said he was nervous and spoke in a very soft voice, appeared to change his testimony at times. Under questioning by defense attorney Robin L. Wheaton, he said he never actually saw a knife and didn't see Holden being stabbed.

In an statement to police the next day, Dent said she was at her aunt's home on Welch when some people next door began "calling her out," Sgt. Shawn Murphy testified.

She began fighting with the younger girl, whose sister came up behind her and started pulling her hair, Dent said.

The pregnant woman said she was being hit with a belt and kicked in the stomach when she found the knife on the ground and stabbed Holden in the chest, Murphy said.

Wheaton argued that Dent should face trial on nothing more than a manslaughter charge. But McAra said there was enough evidence to support the murder count.

Dent is set for an Oct. 10 arraignment in Genesee County Circuit Court.

Woman, 74, arraigned in spouse's shooting death

POLICE BLOTTER

GENESEE COUNTY

THE FLINT JOURNAL FIRST EDITION

Thursday, September 22, 2005

By Paul Janczewski pjanczewski@flintjournal.com • 810.766.6333

GENESEE COUNTY

A Flint woman, 74, will be arraigned Oct. 12 in Genesee County Circuit Court on a second-degree murder charge in the shooting death of her husband.

Addie L. Calhoun remains lodged in the county jail, but Flint District Judge Michael D. McAra reduced her cash bond to \$7,500 following a preliminary examination Tuesday.

During the hearing, Charles Hardwick, a neighbor, told assistant Genesee County Prosecutor Karen Hansen he saw the woman with a handgun approach her husband on a porch. The husband also was armed with a weapon, witnesses told police.

Seconds later, Hardwick heard another argument between the two, followed by a gunshot, and saw Addie Calhoun sitting near her husband.

He said she was not crying and appeared angry.

Jesse T. Calhoun, 73, died from a single gunshot to his chest, a pathologist ruled.

The incident occurred at the couple's home on Alexander Street near Dayton Street on Sept. 3.

- Paul Janczewski

Security firm aids victims of violence

Thursday, September 22, 2005

By Danielle Quisenberry
The Grand Rapids Press

KENT COUNTY -- Victims of domestic violence sometimes lie awake in their own homes, fearing their abusers will find and kill them, anti-violence activists say.

"They need and deserve protection from an abuser," said Grand Rapids police Sgt. Tim Williams, head of the department's family services division, which fields about 2,300 domestic violence calls each year.

To provide that protection, area police and family support agencies are working with ADT Security Services Inc. to equip victims' homes with alarm systems, the Kent County Domestic Violence Community Coordinated Response Team was to announce today.

Beginning this afternoon, men and women who have filed a restraining order against an individual they fear will attack them could have an ADT system installed free, said Rosalynn Bliss, response team chairwoman and director of prevention services at the Child and Family Resource Center in Grand Rapids. County police agencies have agreed to prioritize response to silent alarms triggered by domestic assault victims.

The effort is part of ADT's national Abused Woman's Active Response Emergency program, credited with helping to save 31 lives across the country since it started in 1992. Kent County is the 176th community to launch the program, said ADT spokeswoman Catherine Barto Meyer. Individuals protected by the program are victims of severe violence, Barto-Meyer said. "These are people who have a serious history and will probably be killed if they don't get some help." Local victim advocates at Safe Haven Ministries and the YWCA will refer to ADT "at risk" individuals who have or are seeking a personal protection order and have scored high on a danger assessment test, Bliss said.

Once installed, security systems should allow victims and their children to get some sleep, she said.

"A lot of times, the victim does not feel safe in her home," she said. "The children do not feel safe, and they have a hard time sleeping at night."

Victims can hang from their neck or clip to their belts a pendant that when pressed will trigger the silent alarm.

Atlanta woman accused of theft of Katrina cash

By BILL TORPY

The Atlanta Journal-Constitution

Published on: 09/22/05

Federal prosecutors aim to make an example of an Atlanta woman charged with pretending to be a New Orleans evacuee and receiving \$2,000 in disaster assistance.

Nakia Dewuane Grimes, 30, an unemployed ninth-grade dropout, has been charged with alleged theft of government property and mail fraud.

"It is shameful that someone would try to take advantage of a national tragedy by filing a false claim for money dedicated to the victims of Hurricane Katrina," U.S. Attorney David Nahmias said.

"We do not prosecute many \$2,000 fraud cases," said Nahmias. But in this case, he said, "The message is: You better not do it or we will prosecute you."

He said this case was the first Katrina-related fraud case to be prosecuted by his office. If convicted, Grimes could face up to five years in prison. Her case is not the first hurricane fraud case in the metro area, however. A DeKalb County woman was arrested on fraud charges last week in Cobb County for allegedly accepting \$1,300 from the Red Cross.

Grimes, who appeared before a federal magistrate Wednesday, allegedly applied for funds on the Federal Emergency Management Agency's Web site, giving a New Orleans address and phone number. Grimes said she was employed at a casino and that her home had been damaged. She gave an Atlanta address as the place she was staying.

Nahmias said FEMA is in a difficult situation because it is trying to distribute millions of dollars quickly to thousands of people without having time to do thorough background checks. "The complaint is that not enough people get (assistance) quickly enough," Nahmias said. FEMA has had nearly 26,000 applications for assistance in Georgia and has given out nearly \$52 million in aid.

"This system is based on honesty," he said in a short press conference after Grimes appeared in federal court. "It's always a fear that where there's a lot of money, there's an opportunity for people to try to get it illegally."

Nahmias would not say how officials realized that Grimes was not a New Orleans resident. He urged the public to tip off officials to potential fraud.

Mary Hudak, a spokeswoman for FEMA, said, "There are some checks and balances," such as cross checking addresses and social security numbers.

Federal investigators determined the Atlanta address Grimes gave FEMA was her grandparents' home and that she had always lived in Atlanta. She was arrested Tuesday outside a post office on Metropolitan Avenue after picking up the FEMA check. She was released on a \$10,000 signature bond and later ran from the federal courthouse as television crews waited for her.

Former day-care provider busted again for drug possession

Thursday, September 22, 2005

By Lisa Medendorp

MUSKEGON CHRONICLE STAFF WRITER

A former day-care provider who went to jail in 1999 after several pounds of marijuana were found during a raid at her Muskegon Township home has again been charged with a drug offense.

Karon, also known as Karen, Marie Green, 55, of 1074 Becker, has been charged with possession with intent to deliver less than 50 grams of cocaine. She was arrested by the West Michigan Enforcement Team, the same drug unit that busted her in 1998.

In addition, Green has been charged with being a felon in possession of a firearm, and also faces a second-offense habitual offender count.

Judge Andrew Wierengo III set bail at \$20,000 cash or surety at Monday's 60th District Court arraignment. Preliminary examination was scheduled for Oct. 3.

At the time of the November 1998 raid, Green and her husband, Clarence Dale Green Jr., now 54, were arrested for delivery/manufacture of a controlled substance after WEMET found about 3 1/2 pounds of marijuana in their home.

Authorities alleged that drugs were being sold from the house while children were there for day care. Six children were present when that raid occurred, police reported. Karon Green was a licensed day-care provider, prosecutors said at the time.

With regard to the current case, Muskegon County Prosecutor Tony Tague said WEMET got a tip that she was selling cocaine out of her home. Drug officers executed a search warrant "and recovered a quantity of cocaine, a scale and a firearm," the prosecutor said.

This time, "neither the search warrant nor the confidential informant indicated that children were either being sold to or were near the drugs," Tague said.

In 1999, Karon Green pleaded no contest to the marijuana charge and in 1999 was sentenced to nine months in the Muskegon County Jail. Clarence Green, who had prior convictions, was found guilty by a jury and sentenced to six to 13 years in prison. He currently is at the Pugsley Correctional Facility, with his earliest release date listed as November of this year.

Tague said Karon Green could face up to 30 years in prison if she is convicted, but further review of the case may result in yet another charge. Her Becker Road home is near Reeths-Puffer schools, and if the circumstances "fit within the drug-free school zone law," she could face up to 40 years in prison, Tague said.

"She didn't learn her lesson the first time, and we'll be seeking a significant prison sentence to remove her from the area of the school," Tague said.

Grandparent rights: A new law in action

Jackson Citizen Patriot Editorial

Wednesday, September 21, 2005

There are many things a law cannot do for children.

For example, a law cannot coerce parents to provide a child the security that comes within marriage. In 2003, the latest year with full statistics, 1.4 million children were born to unmarried women in America in 2003 -- 34.6 percent of all U.S. births. Those children come into the world often without the relationships many of us take for granted -- such as grandparents.

Fortunately, under Michigan's newly revised grandparent rights law, the state can make some amends for that in a child's life. If the court deems it appropriate after a review -- it can award a child's grandparents the right to visit and build an ongoing relationship with the child. Yes, the law even recognizes grandparent rights in cases where the parents are unmarried, do not live together, but where the paternity is clear.

Earlier this month, Circuit Judge John McBain reviewed a petition by one local grandmother who had not seen her 3-year-old granddaughter in 15 months. Her son -- the child's father -- had not married the child's mother, and the domestic relationship had fallen apart after the son was sentenced to a prison term.

None of that is ideal for any child. But that's all the more reason for the law to favor the stability, love and security that are often derived from a strong relationship with grandparents. In the case we mentioned, the judge gave the grandmother court-ordered visitation rights -- four consecutive Sundays, followed by visitation every other weekend.

Granted, that order followed months of review, the involvement of attorneys and a psychologist. That is necessary, because there are times when a grandparent's involvement in an "at risk" child's life poses new risks and hazards. But in this case, the outcome was a consensus that it was in the little girl's best interest to have an ongoing relationship with her grandmother.

Sometimes the law strains mightily to do the right thing, and yet still fails miserably. It seems to us that Michigan's newly revised grandparent-rights law succeeds in mandating that which is just and right -- with commendable due process.

United Way lowers its target to \$5.5M

Agency officials cite job losses in tri-county area

By T.M. Shultz
Lansing State Journal

The annual Capital Area United Way campaign has lowered its goal this year, but it's not because officials believe people are too overwhelmed by Hurricane Katrina relief efforts to give, local officials say.

Instead, the May closing of the General Motors Corp. Lansing Car Assembly plant - with its loss of up to 3,500 jobs - caused United Way officials to adjust their 2005 goal downward, Associate Director Theresa Stevens said.

The United Way campaign - which began Aug. 27 and runs until the end of the year - hopes to raise \$5.5 million, Stevens said.

Last year's campaign raised more than \$5.8 million - about \$600,000 short of the \$6.4 million goal.

"We're encouraged with the results we're getting so far," Stevens said.

United Way President Mike Brown said there's a lot of momentum in early giving that he didn't see last year. He believes people understand that payroll deductions for the United Way campaign won't begin until 2006, so they're able to separate that from the cash they're sending to Katrina relief efforts now.

As money pours into the Gulf Coast, Brown said there also are plenty of local families who could benefit from a little help.

"We've got great needs here," he said.

For example, Brown said, there are about 500 homeless people in Ingham, Eaton and Clinton counties. Many of those people - including families with children - are living in their cars.

The United Way helps support 66 different charitable organizations in the tri-county area which serve some 120,000 people each year, he said.

One of those organizations is the Boys and Girls Club of Lansing.

It saw a huge jump in the number of children it served this summer, President Carmen Turner said.

"As the economy worsens, kids are always the victims," Turner said.

Last year, the club served 250 to 275 children a day during the summer. This year, that number jumped to 320 to 330 children a day, she said.

Without the help of three laid-off GM employees, the club would have had to cut off the number of children it served during the summer, Turner said.

Contact T.M. Shultz at 377-1061 or tshultz@lsj.com.

Nonprofit groups here need donations, too Katrina, economic factors hurt charities

Ann Arbor News Editorial

Thursday, September 22, 2005

Add this to the list of those devastated by Hurricane Katrina: many nonprofit organizations in our own backyard.

Local social service groups say that while residents continue to give generously to those affected by the storm that flooded the Gulf Coast, revenue streams they've come to rely on have been drying up.

"We've been very overwhelmed," said Helena Prince, executive director of Friends in Deed in Ypsilanti, reflecting the sentiments of other nonprofit operators. "This is the worst time I can remember in the 20 years I've been here."

Katrina is hardly the only drain on local nonprofit groups in recent memory. Several reported contributions severely dropped following 9/11 and soon after the Indian Ocean tsunami, when donations that might have gone to local residents instead went to victims thousands of miles away.

Compounding those changes in giving is Michigan's economy. Its stunted recovery means many are not as free to make charitable contributions as they once were.

Where during 9/11's aftermath some could give to both relief efforts in New York and agencies nearby, some today can give to help New Orleans, but not here. The weak economy also means local demand for emergency services is up at a time when state government, because its revenues are down, is having to rein in its contribution to non-profit groups.

That means fewer resources locally to clothe, feed and house the needy. To help them pay their utilities. To assist them with their health care, education or vocational needs.

Like so many of you, we have encouraged others to give to those whose lives have been crippled by Hurricane Katrina. But with many struggling in our own neighborhoods unable to compete with the images of an almost apocalyptic Gulf Coast, we mustn't forget their plight either.

As we write this yet another powerful hurricane, Rita, is gaining strength and moving across the Gulf. Should it devastate cities, towns and villages like Katrina did, we don't doubt that our community will again reach into its pockets and give. Only, remember too that many worthwhile groups aiding many people in our community also need our help.

Katrina shifts conference's focus

THURSDAY, SEPT. 22, 2005 **7A**

to poverty in U.S.

Congressional Black Caucus members seek better policy

By RUBY L. BAILEY
FREE PRESS WASHINGTON STAFF

WASHINGTON — The parties will be fewer and the receptions more somber for people attending today's start of the Congressional Black Caucus Foundation's annual legislative conference.

It's the latest impact of Hurricane Katrina.

The government's response to the hurricane has many of the 43 African-American members of Congress focused on how they can better write policy to help poor people.

"The question is: Are we go-

ing to wrap this up in promises or are we going to deal with the root of poverty, housing, education?" Rep. John Conyers, said this week. He is one of the founders of the caucus.

Conyers and others, including Rep. Carolyn Cheeks Kilpatrick, who — like Conyers — is a Detroit Democrat, have changed their forums to hurricane-related discussions.

The hurricane laid bare the differences between the haves and have-nots when it struck the gulf coast three weeks ago. It also revived a national debate about the on-again, off-again war on poverty.

It was poor, predominantly black Americans who lacked the money or vehicles to escape the hurricane. Since then, many black leaders have brought charges of racism against the administration of President George W. Bush. Democrats and Republicans agree the response was slow and often bungled.

A poll taken earlier this month found 71% of African Americans felt the government's response would have been quicker and stronger if most of the victims had been white; only about 30% of white people agreed.



U.S. Rep. John Conyers, D-Detroit, and others have changed their forums to hurricane-related discussions.

Rep. Mel Watt, D-N.C. and chairman of the Congressional Black Caucus, said Tuesday that he wants to focus the conference debate more on class than race as the nation examines how it met needs for food, water and evacuation after the hurricane.

"We're dealing with this" poverty every day, Watt said. "There are a lot of bad things that poor people want to get

away from, not just hurricanes."

The number of Americans living below the poverty level — \$19,157 in household income for a family of four — increased from 34.6 million to 35.9 million since last year, according to the U.S. Census Bureau. Detroit recently was designated the nation's poorest big city with about one in three residents living below the poverty level, including nearly half of the city's children.

Earl Ofari Hutchinson, a political analyst and social issues commentator, questions why it took a hurricane for the black caucus to focus on U.S. poverty. Before Katrina, the

caucus had planned to focus its panels on global poverty.

Panelists, including Democratic Sens. Barack Obama of Illinois and Hillary Rodham Clinton of New York, are now expected discuss poverty in the United States.

"There should have been an ongoing, full-blown policy all along," said Hutchinson, who is based in Los Angeles.

For information on the Congressional Black Caucus Foundation's Katrina Relief Fund, visit www.cbccfinc.org.

Contact RUBY L. BAILEY at bailey@freepress.com or 202-906-8203.

Analysis

For the Poor, Sudden Celebrity

By Kevin Merida and Michael A. Fletcher Washington Post Staff Writers

Thursday, September 22, 2005; Page A01

DALLAS -- All of a sudden the poor have emerged from the shadows of invisibility, lifted onto a temporary pedestal by natural disaster. Whether it is because of guilt, pity or the nation's generosity in times of crisis, those who lost everything -- many of whom had little to begin with -- find themselves in a strange wonderland of recognition.

The destitute people sent fleeing by Katrina have been offered free housing, free clothing, free cars, free toys, special admission to universities and preferential job treatment. Athletes come to *them*, bestowing jerseys and autographs. Entertainers sing for them, and Bennigan's restaurants here and in Houston announced Katrina's kids could eat without paying for a while.

This is what it's like for the celebrity poor, a new subculture created by Hurricane Katrina.

Chris Lawrence, 49, who spent five days on a New Orleans overpass, is not sure what it all means. Mostly, he sits still in a Dallas shelter and reads the Bible. Describing himself as bone-tired after a life of working two jobs in New Orleans, he figures he's blessed just to be alive. The outpouring of kindness by Texans has restored his belief in compassion. "I had lost faith in humanity," he said.

How far this compassion should extend -- and what it should look like over time -- is looming as the next great social policy debate. What began as a response to the most devastating hurricane in the country's history is segueing to a grander discussion about the treatment of those who live on the margins. Will the Chris Lawrences now be able to improve their lives? Or will they return to their previous status as forgotten Americans with little hold on the attention or sympathies of politicians? And what of those already on the edge of poverty -- or worse -- who do not share the celebrityhood of those displaced by the ravaging floods of Katrina?

These questions are now confronting President Bush -- and the rest of political Washington. In the early days of the crisis, Bush was beset by criticism that he had been insensitive to the black and destitute. But lately, he has been speaking to them. During a prayer service for Katrina's victims at the National Cathedral in Washington on Friday, Bush said the nation must grapple with the entrenched problems of poverty.

"Americans of every race and religion were touched by this storm; yet some of the greatest hardship fell upon citizens already facing lives of struggle: the elderly, the vulnerable and the poor," Bush said. "And this poverty has roots in generations of segregation and discrimination that closed many doors of opportunity. As we clear away the debris of a hurricane, let us also clear away the legacy of inequality."

Some found Bush's words reassuring. Others worried that they would not resonate far into the future. "New Orleans is sort of like South Central [Los Angeles]," said Alan Curtis, president of the Milton S. Eisenhower Foundation, a Washington nonprofit that funds anti-poverty programs. "People ignore the problem of poverty, then every once in a while something catastrophic happens. We talk about it, then we forget about it."

In his plan to rebuild the Gulf Coast, Bush has called for tax breaks to encourage small- and minority-business development and individual accounts of as much as \$5,000 to help storm victims with job training, transportation, child care and other needs. He proposed that the federal government give poor victims its unused property, including foreclosed homes and vacant lots on which they could build their houses.

Democrats have their own big ideas. Sen. Edward M. Kennedy (Mass.) has proposed a Gulf Coast Regional Redevelopment Authority, modeled after the Tennessee Valley Authority, which was created during the New Deal era to address issues from flood control to power production to malaria prevention. Kennedy's Gulf Coast version would fund large education, health and job training initiatives while overseeing rebuilding in the region.

The sense that Democrats have controlled the landscape on poverty and race is not lost on Republican stalwarts who hope their party doesn't miss an opportunity. Ronald Reagan's description in 1976 of the Chicago "welfare queen" who drives a Cadillac lives on as a tale of infamy, remembered by African Americans and anti-poverty advocates as crucial in fueling the perception that blacks were exploiting the welfare system.

"There really has not been a strong Republican message to either the poor or the African American community at large," said Jack Kemp, a former housing secretary and standard-bearer for Republican ideas to fight poverty.

Added former GOP House speaker Newt Gingrich: "This is one of the most important moments in modern history, and in the next three to four weeks we will find out if the party is ready and able to govern."

Extending an Ambivalent Hand

The nation has long been ambivalent toward the poor. The humanitarian instinct to help those in dire straits is often constrained by a lurking feeling that the needy are responsible for their own bad circumstances.

"This country was founded on a very strong work ethic, which has created this sense that if you work hard in America, you get ahead," said Rebecca M. Blank, dean of the Gerald R. Ford School of Public Policy at the University of Michigan. "But not far from that is the idea that if you don't get ahead, you must not be working hard."

David K. Shipler, in his book "The Working Poor," explains the complexity of the struggle to get ahead: "Breaking away and moving a comfortable distance from poverty seems to require a perfect lineup of favorable conditions. A set of skills, a good starting wage, and a job with the likelihood of promotion are prerequisites. But so are clarity of purpose, courageous self-esteem, a lack of substantial debt, the freedom from illness or addiction, a functional family, a network of upstanding friends, and the right help from private or governmental agencies. Any gap in that array is an entry point for trouble, because being poor means being unprotected."

When severe floods struck the lower Mississippi River in 1927, leaving more than 700,000 Delta residents homeless, those dirt-poor victims -- nearly half of whom were black -- received no federal aid. The government simply was not in the business of helping the poor.

It wasn't until nearly a decade later that the first widescale effort to attack poverty was launched with enactment of Social Security, a welfare program for destitute widows and unemployment insurance. Those initiatives were followed by a housing program and later free school lunches, a response to the alarmingly poor nutrition among many World War II recruits. The Great Society efforts of the 1960s and their progeny in the 1970s broadened educational and housing assistance while expanding the nation's safety net with health care programs, food stamps and disability

insurance. But since the 1996 passage of national welfare legislation, tax credits have become among the government's biggest vehicles for helping the poor.

Excluding Social Security, congressional researchers say there are more than 80 poverty-related programs, which in 2003 cost \$522 billion. Yet despite those programs, 37 million Americans -- 12.7 percent of the population -- continue to live in poverty, and the rates are higher in the states hit hardest by Katrina: 16.7 percent in Louisiana, 17 percent in Alabama and 18.6 percent in Mississippi.

In New Orleans, 27.9 percent of the residents are below the federal poverty line -- \$15,000 a year for a family of three, a measure that only begins to capture the deprivation in a city where in 2000, more than one in five households reported incomes of less than \$10,000 per year.

Competing for Jobs and Attention

Some who have fled the Big Easy, where the livin' ain't always easy, are wondering what will become of them. Will they make it?

Ebony Turner, a New Orleans health technician, struggled to keep her optimism but frustration had her near tears. She was staying at a temporary shelter -- a Motel 6 -- in Lewisville, Tex., which has a black population of 7 percent and is 22 miles from downtown Dallas. Officials from federal, state and private agencies were set up at the Dallas Convention Center to help her access the services she needed, but Turner was having a difficult time connecting her needs with their suggestions.

She was told she could get food stamps. "But, Miss," Turner pleaded, "where are we going to cook the food? We're in a shelter." She was told she could get unemployment benefits, that a letter could be mailed to her in two weeks. "Miss, where are you going to send the letter when I don't have an address?" She was told she was eligible for a low-interest federal loan. "Miss, how am I going to pay it back to you? I don't have nothing."

She was told the Salvation Army could provide clothes for her son, a ninth-grader who has a 40-inch waist and wears a size 12 1/2 shoe. The Salvation Army didn't have clothes that fit him, she already knew, and now she was at her wit's end.

"I'm not sending my child to school in flip-flops," she said angrily. "I'd rather go live in swampland than send my kid to school in flip-flops. Where is the government right now? I don't know what to do."

This same sense of demoralization is heard by the down-and-out who are not Katrina celebrities. They have watched from the background as the hurricane's victims have been shuttled to the front of the help lines. They wonder: After Katrina's survivors are taken care of, will there be anything left for us?

This anxiety was starkly displayed at a Dallas job fair last week. The plan was to hold the fair at a local community college with 30 employers manning booths. But in the hurricane's wake, the event was switched to the Dallas Convention Center and it grew to 225 employers -- so many wanted to take part that some companies had to be turned away.

Technically, the job fair was open to anyone in search of work. But employers' soft hearts were reserved for the Gulf Coast's displaced residents. For recruiters, the requirement for admission was that they have actual jobs to hand out right away. To emphasize that point, each recruiter was given a whistle to blow when someone was hired.

Jennifer Carter, who had been a data-entry technician for the New Orleans police department, didn't realize the fair was open to non-Katrina survivors until she noticed the nicely tailored Nora Gonzalez assert herself at the hiring table of a personnel services company. According to Carter,

Gonzalez jumped in front of her, saying, "Well, I'm from Texas, this is my résumé." Fumed Carter: "They should give us an opportunity because we have nothing."

Told of Carter's perspective, Gonzalez seemed surprised. Her friend, Keyla Robinson, who was looking for clerical work, chimed in: "Why should you feel guilty? We're in need, too."

That sentiment was echoed during interviews at the job fair, as hardship stories were told by those whose lives had come unglued by disasters of a different kind.

Keisha Sims, 29, had been an order clerk at a Dallas barbecue joint until her son was partially paralyzed when he fell off the monkey bars at a day care center. She took off two years to care for him but needed to return to work. She wound up at the 7-Eleven booth, where the hiring whistle was screeching, hoping to land a job selling Slurpees.

Sims was despondent. She had just heard from her sister, who called crying because she had been bumped from an apartment she had been approved for. Again, Katrina benevolence. "I feel like this: It's okay to help people," said Sims. "But it's like they went above and beyond to help them."

Melvin Hewitt understands this. The union representative from the Gentilly area of New Orleans recounted what he had seen outside of Reunion Arena, which had been serving as a downtown shelter in Dallas. A man offered Hewitt's brother a crisp bill, only to ask for it back when he realized it was \$10. The man apologized, saying he hadn't meant to give the Katrina survivor such a small amount. He then pulled a \$100 bill from his pocket.

"They show us love," Hewitt remarked, still amazed by that act of generosity. "Much, much love."

Fletcher reported from Washington. Staff writer Jonathan Weisman and research editor Lucy Shackelford contributed to this report

input on how to combat poverty

Thursday, September 22, 2005

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A trio of city commissioners will hold forums in the next few weeks to get public input on how City Hall can better address poverty in Kalamazoo.

The purpose of the meetings is to hear from residents, particularly those living in poverty, about how public policies can help to improve quality of life, said Commissioner Don Cooney, who serves on the City Commission's Poverty Subcommittee with Vice Mayor Hannah McKinney and Commissioner Mary Balkema.

"The poverty rate in Kalamazoo is not much below the poverty rate in New Orleans," Cooney said last week in promoting the forums. While the Hurricane Katrina disaster has shined a spotlight on the poor in New Orleans, poverty in Kalamazoo is equally problematic, Cooney said.

Twenty-four percent of Kalamazoo residents were living at or below the federal poverty level as of the 2000 census. The poverty rate is estimated to be 27 percent in New Orleans.

Forums are scheduled for 7 p.m. Sept. 29 at Open Door Ministries, 416 Phelps St.; 7 p.m. Oct. 4 at the Edison Neighborhood Association, 1356 Portage St.; and 7 p.m. Oct. 11 at the Northside Association for Community Development, 612 N. Park St.